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Version 1.3

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Excerpt from Sebastian Starchild's
Personal Log p1-880.76
From Motherbank Personnel File: Starchild.0125

<Agent Isis Nile and I are en route to the planet Naga (see sup. file: Naga Planet: rlyf-mothbank-naga-xt54.nt [172.62.1]), after infiltrating a Shadow Black stronghold. (see sup. file: ShadowBlack: [sXdwblk.mothbank.shwblk.idreqc]) At Motherbank's insistence, Agent Nile has been allowed to accompany me for the remainder of this mission. She hasn't gotten in my way and might be of some help yet. We believe that the key to stopping the Nano-Tech Bugs (Motherbank classified file: Nanotech Insects: ntib.187) is located on this dead crystalline planet, possibly in an Ammonia Cave. The Bugs continue to devastate planet after planet, and time is running short. If we don't find a way to stop these bugs soon, there may be nothing left.
-Agent Sebastian Starchild dr-880.76>

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PART III:
REVELATIONS
NAGA: HARSHEST OF THE OUTER WORLDS, VIRGIN AND UNINHABITED, A PLANET OF BARREN CRYSTAL...
THE BIG GUNS, STARCHILD?
WHEN THE TARGET'S UNKNOWN, NILE...
...THE BIGGER THE BETTER.
NOW LET'S JUST HOPE YOU MEMORIZED THOSE COORDINATES CORRECTLY.
INFERNO'S COMPUTER SYSTEM PINPOINTED AN AMMONIA ICE CAVE...
...JUST LIKE THAT-- PERFECT PLACE TO STASH THE "LUCIFER FILE."
ALSO A PERFECT PLACE FOR SOMETHING ELSE.
SUCH AS?
OUR DEATH-TRAP.

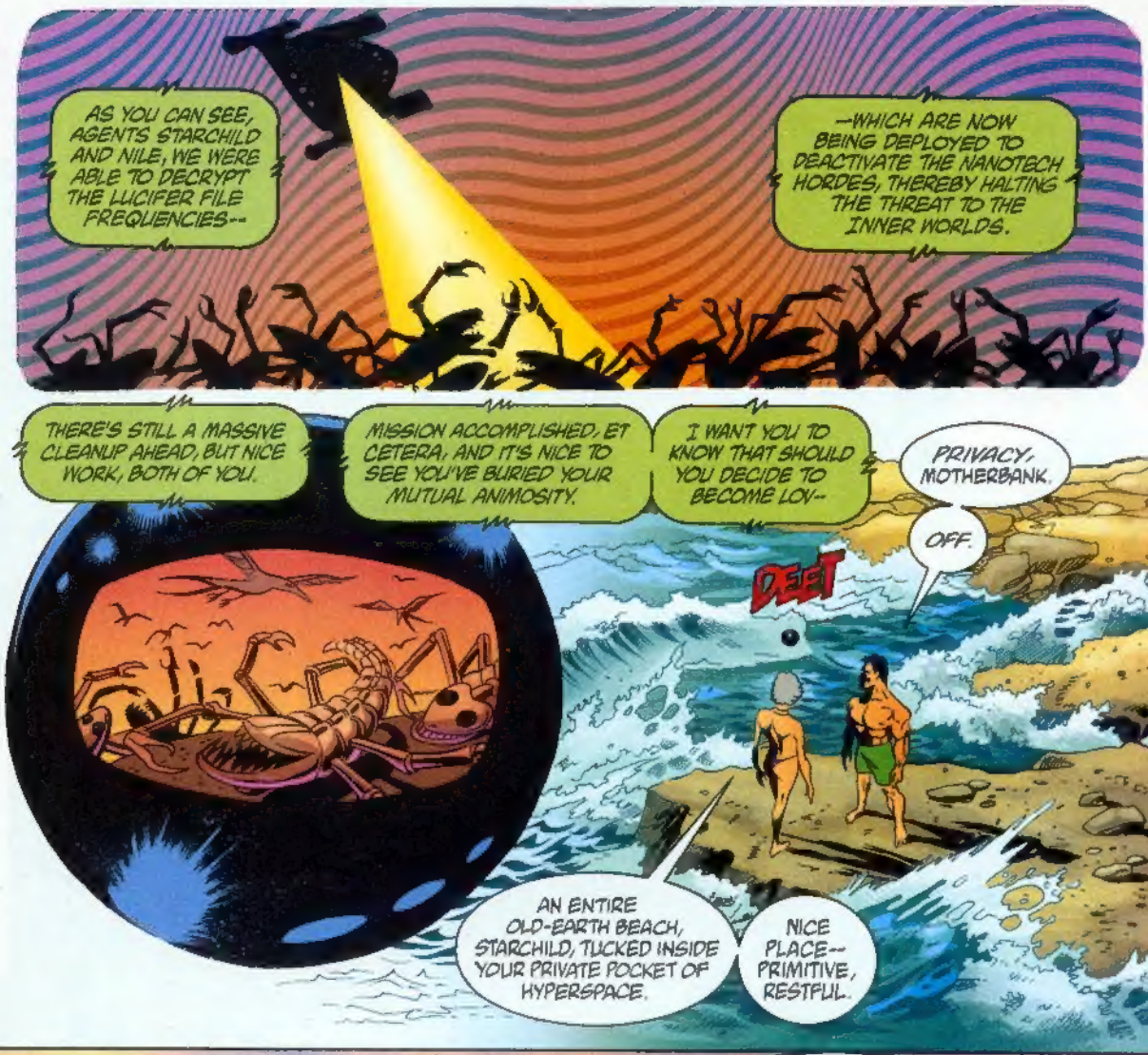
THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO STEAL THE CHEESE WITHOUT GETTING OUR TAILS SNAPPED.
SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN, NILE--BUT ONE WITH A PROBLEM.
NAMELY?
RECOGNIZING THE TRAP BEFORE IT'S--
--SPRUNG.
SHOOM SHOOM SHOOM
A MECH-SENTINEL.
GOOD EYE, STARCHILD--BUT NO CHEESE.
KLIT
BECAUSE WE HAVEN'T ENTERED THE REAL TRAP, NILE ...NOT YET.
COME ON--LET'S DO IT.

YOU SAID THIS "LUCIFER FILE" IS A METALLIC POLYHEDRON?
THAT'S WHAT THE INFERNO COMPUTER DEPICTED--BUT DON'T ASK ME WHY SHADOW BLACK WOULD SECURE NANOTECH ACTIVATION FREQUENCIES IN A DESIGN LIKE THAT.
ALL RIGHT, I WON'T --BUT I WILL ASSUME THAT'S IT.
GOOD ASSUMPTION-- AND IT DOES LOOK LIKE DANGLED BAIT.
EXACTLY-- TEMPTING US FROM THE END OF WHAT LOOKS LIKE A GAUNTLET.
THE REAL TRAP--AND ITS CHEESE.
NO DOUBT, NILE...
...SO WHO RUNS THE GAUNTLET AND WHO COVERS?
YOU FIGURE IT OUT, STARCHILD...
...I'M ALREADY GONE.
COVER ME!
WAIT!
BLPT
CH-KLK

BUKSH
KUSHT
HEADS UP, STARCHILD--I JUST TRIGGERED SOMETHING!
WHRRR-CHKT
MORE MECH-SENTINELS...
WHRRR-CHKT
...AND I JUST FREED THEM!
WHRRR-CHKT
CHAOW
I'LL TAKE THE ONES TO THE LEFT! COVER MY RIGHT!
GO, NILE!
I'LL COVER LEFT AND RIGHT! YOU JUST SNATCH THE PRIZE!
SHOOM

ALL RIGHT, STARCHILD...
SPRAKSH
KRAKSH
...BUT DON'T LET THAT GOOD EYE GO BAD NOW.
MADE IT! TIME TO--
KLTCH DEET
OH HELL.
K-K-K-K-K-K
WE WERE BOTH WRONG!
KRAKSH
THE REAL TRAP IS THE ICE-CAVE ITSELF!
RUN, NILE--AND DON'T STOP!
TSH
PSH
KSH

SPRAKSH
KRUKSH
FASTER, NILE! THE WHOLE CAVE'S COMING DOWN!
KRAK-K-K-K-K-K-K-
KRAKSH
PERFECT TRAP MAYBE, STARCHILD--BUT ONLY UNTIL IT MET OUR UNSNAPPED ASSES.
STILL GOT ITS BAIT?
ONE METALLIC POLYHEDRON "LUCIFER FILE" RIGHT HERE--AS IF I'D GIVE THE DAMNED THING UP AFTER THAT.
THEN LET'S GET IT TO MOTHERBANK...
"...BEFORE THE NANO-TECH HUNGERBUGS DEVOUR HER AND EVERYTHING ELSE ON THE INNER WORLDS."
SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN WITHOUT A PROBLEM-- YOUR PLACE OR MINE?
EVER BEEN INSIDE A TESSERACT?
SEE, I KNEW I'D GET YOU TO TALK DIRTY.
NILE, YOU AIN'T HEARD NOTHIN' YET.


AS YOU CAN SEE, AGENTS STARCHILD AND NILE, WE WERE ABLE TO DECRYPT THE LUCIFER FILE FREQUENCIES--
--WHICH ARE NOW BEING DEPLOYED TO DEACTIVATE THE NANOTECH HORDES, THEREBY HALTING THE THREAT TO THE INNER WORLDS.
THERE'S STILL A MASSIVE CLEANUP AHEAD, BUT NICE WORK, BOTH OF YOU.
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, ET CETERA, AND IT'S NICE TO SEE YOU'VE BURIED YOUR MUTUAL ANIMOSITY.
I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT SHOULD YOU DECIDE TO BECOME LOV--
PRIVACY, MOTHERBANK.
OFF.
DEET
AN ENTIRE OLD-EARTH BEACH, STARCHILD, TUCKED INSIDE YOUR PRIVATE POCKET OF HYPERSPACE.
NICE PLACE-- PRIMITIVE, RESTFUL.
EXCEPT IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE THE DANGER'S OVER, DOES IT?
ASIDE FROM THE USUAL POST-MISSION LETDOWN, NO.
FEELS LIKE SAVING THE WORLDS WAS FAR TOO EASY.
BUT MAYBE WE JUST WORK WELL TOGETHER.
...AND MAYBE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.
I COUNTED AT LEAST FIVE, NILE-- AND SPEAKING OF WHICH...

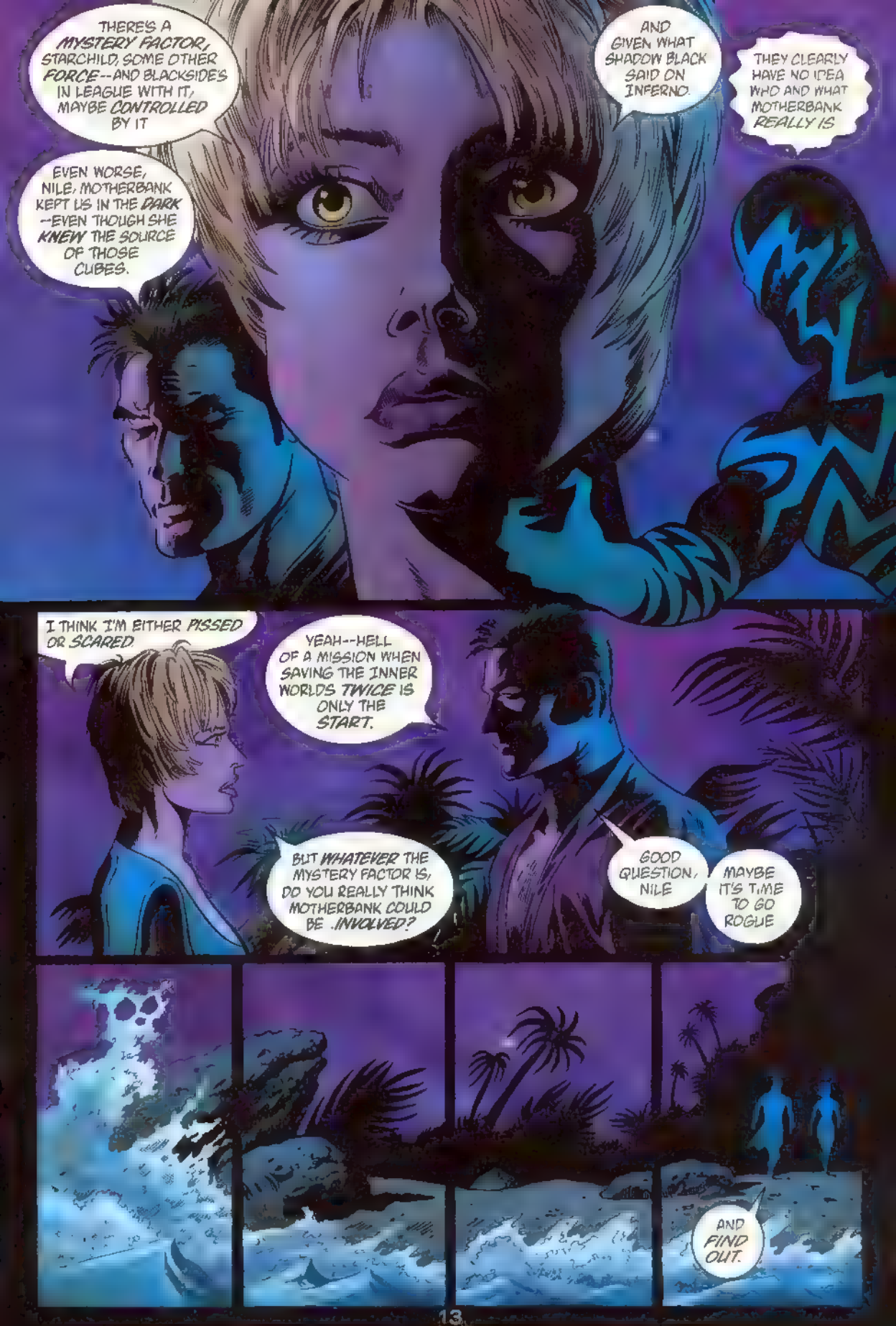
FWSHSH
YAHH!
DAMN YOU, STARCHILD!
HOLDS OFF, ORB.
SPOILSPORT!
MMNHNNN
WAKE UP!

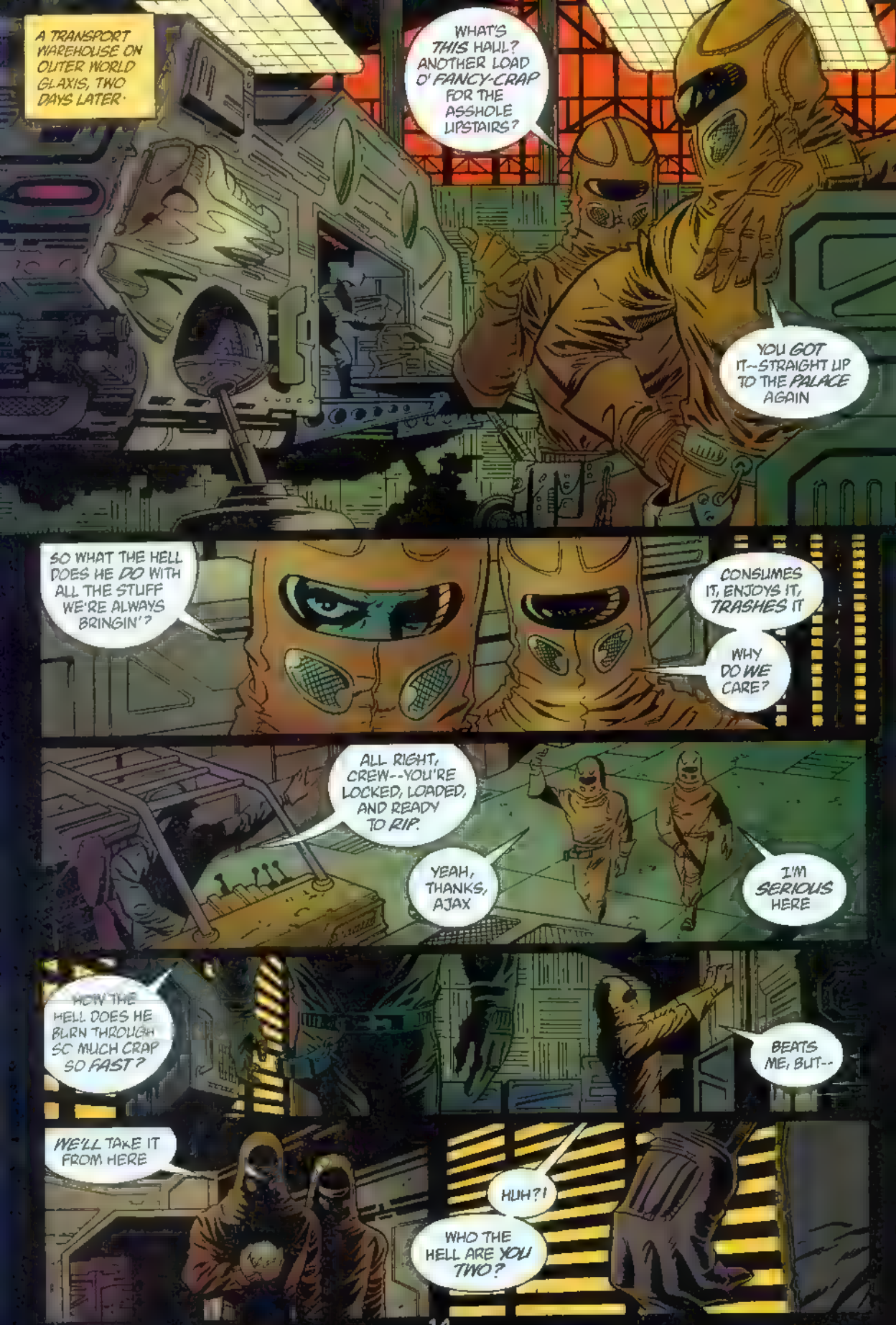
WH-WHA ..?
ISIS?
NILE?
SHE'S.. GONE?
TELEPORTED TO HER PRIMUS STATION TWO HOURS AGO.
THEN WHAT THE HELL, ORB.. HOLOS ON.
BEAUTIFUL SCENE, SEBASTIAN.
WHOLE LOT OF EVERYTHING, ORB --EXCEPT WHAT I WANT.
WHAT DO YOU WANT? YOUR REAL MOTHER AND FATHER? ISIS NILE?
SOMETHING REAL, WHICH DISQUALIFIES YOUR "BEAUTIFUL SCENE."
HOLOS OFF.
MAKE UP YOUR MIND!
WHY BOTHER? EITHER WAY, I'M STILL ALONE...

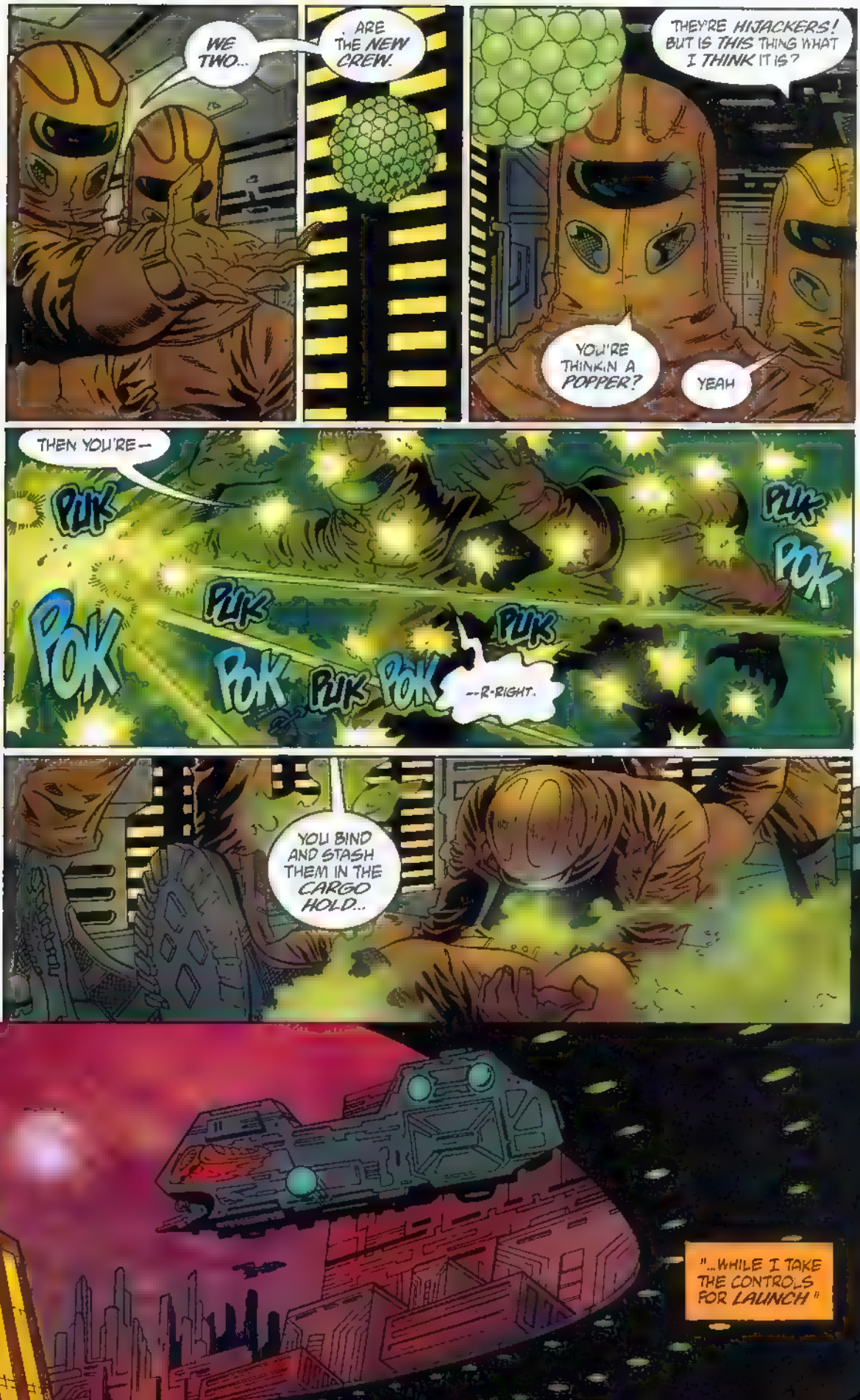
"FOREVER ALONE"
INCOMING LIFEFORM TRANSMISSION
TEK
NOT AGAIN
SHUNK
SAP
WHAT GOOD IS A TESSERACT HIDEOUT--
BAW BAW BAW
--IF MOTHERBANK WON'T CHANGE MY TELEPORT SECURITY CODES?
SHE DID CHANGE THEM.
THEN WHO--?
relax, starchild.
IT'S YOUR PARTNER
NILE
AND YOU CAME BACK --EVEN THOUGH OUR MISSION'S FINISHED
IT'S NOT FINISHED, BUT DON'T SHOW IT
ROMANTIC NIGHT OUT THERE
LET'S ENJOY IT.
PRIVACY, ORB-- OFF.
DEET

ALL RIGHT, NILE, NOW WHAT'S THE BIG--
WE'RE UP AGAINST MORE THAN SHADOW BLACK.
OF COURSE--HIS BLACKSIDE ORG IS COVERTLY SPONSORED BY THE OUTER WORLDS AUTHORITIES, AND WHETHER BLACK ESCAPED OR NOT, THEY'LL PROBABLY TRY AGAIN, BUT..
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN--NOT AFTER SNOOPING THROUGH OUR DEFENSE SATELLITE FILES TODAY.
WHY?
TO TRACE THE TRAJECTORY AND SOURCE OF THE TROJAN ROBOT MYSTERY CUBES.
OBVIOUSLY ONE OF THE OUTER WORLDS.
WRONG.
AND THE ACTUAL ANSWER MAKES NO SENSE--BECAUSE THERE'S NO WAY THE CUBES COULD HAVE GOTTEN HERE FROM THERE
NOT WITHOUT AN IMPOSSIBLE JOURNEY - WHICH THEY SOMEHOW MADE
SPIT IT OUT, NILE
THE CUBES CAME FROM THE ONE PLACE FROM WHICH NOTHING CAN EMERGE, NOT EVEN LIGHT
IMPOSSIBLE
BUT TRUE
A BLACK HOLE.

NO NOT A TRUE BLACK HOLE
WHAT THEN?
A DOORWAY TO SOMETHING EVEN STRANGER...ONE END OF A TUNNEL ..
...A CONNECTION BETWEEN TWO BLACK HOLES, THEIR GRAVITATIONAL SINGULARITIES MESHING TO OPEN A WARP THROUGH THE SPACE-TIME MATRIX..
ENABLING THE VAST SPACE BETWEEN THE TWO BLACK HOLES TO TO BE TRAVERSED IN BRIEF TIME...
... A WORMHOLE-- A COSMIC SHORTCUT-- AND THE OTHER BLACK HOLE, THE OTHER END OF THE TUNNEL.. COULD BE ANYWHERE
LIKE I SAID, THIS GOES WAY BEYOND BLACKSIDE
THE EYEBALL-BOMB'S NEW SUBSTANCE, CAPABLE OF CONTAINING ANTIMATTER WITHOUT CHAIN-REACTING..
...THE UNPRECEDENTED DESIGN OF THE LUCIFER FILE--WITH NANOTECH FREQUENCIES EMBEDDED IN THE VIBRATION RATE OF ITS CRYSTALLINE STRUCTURE.
...THE WORLD-DESTROYING SCOPE OF BOTH ATTACKS


THERE'S A MYSTERY FACTOR, STARCHILD, SOME OTHER FORCE--AND BLACKSIDE'S IN LEAGUE WITH IT, MAYBE CONTROLLED BY IT
EVEN WORSE, NILE, MOTHERBANK KEPT US IN THE DARK --EVEN THOUGH SHE KNEW THE SOURCE OF THOSE CUBES.
AND GIVEN WHAT SHADOW BLACK SAID ON INFERNO.
THEY CLEARLY HAVE NO IDEA WHO AND WHAT MOTHERBANK REALLY IS
I THINK I'M EITHER PISSED OR SCARED.
YEAH--HELL OF A MISSION WHEN SAVING THE INNER WORLDS TWICE IS ONLY THE START.
BUT WHATEVER THE MYSTERY FACTOR IS, DO YOU REALLY THINK MOTHERBANK COULD BE ..INVOLVED?
GOOD QUESTION, NILE
MAYBE IT'S TIME TO GO ROGUE
AND FIND OUT.


A TRANSPORT WAREHOUSE ON OUTER WORLD GLAXIS, TWO DAYS LATER.
WHAT'S THIS HAUL? ANOTHER LOAD O' FANCY-CRAP FOR THE ASSHOLE UPSTAIRS?
YOU GOT IT--STRAIGHT UP TO THE PALACE AGAIN
SO WHAT THE HELL DOES HE DO WITH ALL THE STUFF WE'RE ALWAYS BRINGIN'?
CONSUMES IT, ENJOYS IT, TRASHES IT
WHY DO WE CARE?
ALL RIGHT, CREW--YOU'RE LOCKED, LOADED, AND READY TO RIP.
YEAH, THANKS, AJAX
I'M SERIOUS HERE
HOW THE HELL DOES HE BURN THROUGH SO MUCH CRAP SO FAST?
BEATS ME, BUT--
WE'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE
HUH?!
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU TWO?


WE TWO..
ARE THE NEW CREW.
THEY'RE HIJACKERS! BUT IS THIS THING WHAT I THINK IT IS?
YOU'RE THINKIN A POPPER?
YEAH
THEN YOU'RE--
PUK
POK
PUK
POK
PUK
POK
PUK
POK
--R-RIGHT.
YOU BIND AND STASH THEM IN THE CARGO HOLD..
"..WHILE I TAKE THE CONTROLS FOR LAUNCH"

THERE IT IS, THE ORBITING PALACE OF THE OUTER WORLDS MAGISTRATE, AND LET'S HOPE THEY'RE EXPECTING--
INCOMING SUPPLY SHIP.
LOADING DOCK OPENED.
PERFECT
ABOUT TIME YOU GOT HERE
HE'S ASKING FOR SOME CRATE OF SPECIAL WINE HE ORDERED, AND YOU KNOW HOW HE--
WAIT A MINUTE--WHO ARE THOSE TWO?
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!
HWOK
CHUT
SPECIAL DELIVERY

GO--BEAT THE ALARMS!
MORPHIC RESONANCE FIELDS?
NONE DETECTED-- THEY'RE JUST ROBOTS.
CHUN
SRAK
ZOP
ALL RIGHT, LET'S DO IT FAST
WE FIND THE MAGISTRATE..
NAIL WHAT WE NEED, AND GET OUT.
CHAKT
VZHAH
JACKPOT.

THE MAGISTRATE'S PLEASURE DOME
FRESH MEAT AND ALL PRIME.
SINCE I DO NOT RECALL ORDERING A TESLA-9 -- --OR ANY OTHER SIDEARM, FOR THAT MATTER --I ASSUME THIS INTRUSION PORTENDS TROUBLE?
HUGE TROUBLE, MAGISTRATE
UNLESS YOU COOPERATE
AND IF I REFUSE?
WE BROUGHT FRESH SUPPLIES, BUT YOU'RE ALL OUT OF OPTIONS
YOUR AIDES AND ROBOTS ARE DOWN-- AND YOU'RE ORBITING ALONE NOW. ALL ALONE IN YOUR COLD PALACE
THERE'S NOTHING BUT YOUR TECHED-UP PLEASURE DOLLS --AND US.
NO PROTECTION, MAGISTRATE, NO AUTHORITY, NO POWER
YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE SAFE UP HERE, ABOVE IT ALL

AND YOU WERE--UNTIL WE CRASHED THE PARTY.
AND JUST WHO ARE YOU?
THE ONES ASKING THE QUESTIONS, MAGISTRATE.
ALL OF THEM.
SEBASTIAN STARCHILD AND ISIS NILE --AGENTS OF S.C.I.-SPY.
YUMMM.
STARCHILD, EITHER YOU SMACK THAT CYBER-BITCH FLAT OR I--
HEY!
YOU WANT SOMETHING, SNAKE?
MMMORE.
YEAH? TWITCH THAT TONGUE AND I'LL KNOT IT AROUND YOUR THROAT.
ENOUGH, DOLLS--THEY'RE LACKEYS OF MY OPPOSITE NUMBER, THE INNER WORLDS MAGISTRATE.
WRONG--WE DON'T HAVE A SINGLE RULER...
THE INNER WORLDS ARE INDEPENDENT--AND MOTHERBANK IS NOTHING BUT DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL COVERT INVESTIGATIONS.
HAVE IT YOUR WAY, BUT SHE STILL RUNS AND RULES HER INNER WORLDS--AND THEREBY CONTROLS THE FATES OF MY OUTER WORLDS.

AND THAT JUSTIFIES YOUR SPONSORSHIP OF THE BLACKSIDE ORG?
I HAVE EMPLOYED SHADOW BLACK IN THE PAST, BUT ONLY FOR MINOR OPERATIONS.
IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL THEM, MAGISTRATE? ANTIMATTER BOMBS AND NANOTECH PLAGUES ARE "MINOR OPERATIONS"?
YOUR REFERENCES ELUDE ME, AGENT NILE, AND I'VE NOT SEEN SHADOW BLACK IN MONTHS --NOT SINCE I REJECTED HIS LATEST PROPOSAL AND BANISHED HIM FROM THIS PALACE.
HE'S LYING, STARCHILD, COVERING SOMETHING UP--JUST LIKE MOTHERBANK--AND THE KEY IS THE BLACK HOLE, THE OTHER FORCE INVOLVED.
I AM NOT LYING, ALTHOUGH YOU ARE QUITE CORRECT ABOUT "ANOTHER FORCE."
WHO?
NOT WHO, BUT WHAT--AN ALIEN FORCE.
THERE ARE NO ALIENS! WE'VE SEARCHED FOR MORE THAN A THOUSAND YEARS! THERE'S NO ONE BUT US!
WE'RE ALONE IN THE UNIVERSE!
THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG, AS I WILL SHOW Y--
HIT THAT ALARM AND YOUR BRAIN EJECTS!
ALARMING, YES, BUT I ASSURE YOU...
...THIS IS NOT AN ALARM.
TEK

YOU SEE, I MET ONE...
WHAT DID--?
THE FLOOR, STAR-CHILD!
OPENING.
SOMETHING RISING.
...AND I MET IT IN THIS VERY DOME.
IT...IT WASN'T AN ALARM.
IT'S...A TROPHY.
OR A TRICK.
THAT CAME THROUGH THE WORMHOLE?
FROM WHERE? WHERE IS THE WORMHOLE'S OTHER END?
THE LAST PLACE ANY OF US WOULD THINK.
THE ONLY WORLD WHICH IS NOT ALIEN.
THE HOME-WORLD.
OLD EARTH?
IT WAS DESTROYED WHEN ITS SUN WENT NOVA, FORCING OUR ANCESTORS TO FLEE, TO MIGRATE HERE AND COLONIZE ARCTURUS!
A LIE, AGENT NILE, NOTHING BUT AN AUDACIOUS COVER STORY--CONCOCTED BY YOUR PRECIOUS MOTHERBANK TO MASK THE TRUTH.
INDEED, EARTH'S ACTUAL FATE IS VEILED BEHIND THE ARCTURUS SYSTEM'S GREAT SECRET AND GREAT SHAME.

OUR HISTORY IS NOTHING BUT *MYTH*, A CLEVER MYTH -- EVEN *I* BELIEVED--UNTIL SHADOW BLACK BROUGHT *THIS* TO ME, HOPING I WOULD *SANCTION* HIS DEAL WITH THE DEVIL.
INSTEAD, I *KILLED* THE DEVIL --NOT SUSPECTING, THEN, THAT THERE WAS A WHOLE *WORLD* OF SUCH DEVILS.
ON *EARTH*... OCCUPYING OUR *HOMEWORLD*...EVER SINCE THEY *EVICTED OUR ANCESTORS*.
AND IF THERE'S A NEARBY *WORMHOLE*, AS YOU CLAIM, THEN IT MEANS THE DEVILS ARE *COMING* -- PROBABLY *SOON*--TO FINISH WHAT THEY STARTED ONE THOUSAND YEARS IN THE PAST...
THE COMPLETE AND UTTER *CONQUEST OF HUMANITY*.
NEXT: PART III ORIGINAL SIN